



Fact Sheet

August 2010

Prescription Drug Abuse -- a DEA Focus --

- In 2008, there were 6.2 million Americans aged 12 years and older who abused *prescription drugs for non-medical purposes within the past month – more than the number of people who are abusing cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, and inhalants, combined.
- In 2008, on average, 5,965 persons per day abused prescription pain relievers for the first time. The total number of individuals that initiated with any controlled substance pharmaceutical (pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, and sedatives) for the first time exceeded the number of individuals that abused marijuana for the first time.¹
- Every day, on average, 2,500 teens use prescription drugs to get high for the first time.
- 1 in 7 teens admit to abusing prescription drugs to get high in the past year. Sixty percent of teens who abused prescription pain relievers did so before the age of 15.
- Fifty-six percent of teens believe that prescription drugs are easier to get than illicit drugs.
- 2 in 5 teens believe that prescription drugs are “much safer” than illegal drugs. And 3 in 10 teens believe that prescription pain relievers are not addictive.
- Sixty-three percent of teens believe that prescription drugs are easy to get from friends’ and family’s medicine cabinet.
- According to the Center for Disease Control, prescription drugs, including opioids and antidepressants, are responsible for more overdose deaths than “street drugs” such as cocaine, heroin, and amphetamines.
- DEA works closely with the medical community to help them recognize drug abuse and signs of diversion, and relies on their input and due diligence to combat diversion. Unfortunately, egregious drug violations by practitioners do sometimes occur – fortunately doctor involvement in illegal drug activity is rare. When violations do occur, DEA will pursue criminal, civil, and administrative actions against such practitioners as warranted.

¹ According to the 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, released in 2009, the total number of new initiates using pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, and sedatives was 2,512,000 and those initiating with marijuana was 2,178,000.